

Acts 2:1-11

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene (si-re-ne); visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

For this morning's message we'll continue in the series on the Holy Spirit, and I'm going to discuss a subject that is not brought up very often around here- can you guess what it is? We're going to look at the gift of tongues. Speaking in tongues is probably the most poorly understood gift of the Spirit — I don't mean that to be a pun. On the surface, I know it can be very hard to see the reason for the gift of tongues - a lot of people are turned away from it because it seems to be senseless babble that can't be deciphered without an interpretation, and most people just have a hard time latching onto something that can't be immediately understood or that has controversy surrounding it. I do want to tell you that Pastor Brian has affirmed to me that our denomination does indeed recognize the gift of tongues as a gift for us today, so I do feel bold enough to speak to you about this topic!

This morning, we are actually going to look at what I believe is the reason why the Holy Spirit has given us the gift of tongues. With that, I'm not going to get into the use of tongues or how to speak in

tongues, that is a different message. Now, I hope that you won't just tune out or change the YouTube channel just because I'm speaking about tongues, I believe this is going to be a different message than what you have heard before. This message came out of my own research during one of my theology courses a few years ago, and most of it is based on an essay I wrote, for which my Professor commended me and said he had never heard anyone explain tongues like this. So this is an original message that I believe is inspired by the Holy Spirit. What I want to do this morning is lay a foundation for you that will help you see why it was so necessary for the gift of tongues to be a part of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit from the Day of Pentecost and onward, and my hope is that this message will encourage everyone of you to be open to seeking this gift. If you are particularly opposed to this gift, I ask that you would please hear what I have to say and open your heart to what the Spirit may say to you.

The Thread from Babel to Pentecost

I think most of you know that the gift of tongues came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, as found in Acts 2, we'll come back to that in a moment. However, the phenomenon of spontaneously speaking in tongues other than a learned tongue (or language) actually has its precedence in the time of Genesis. Let's take a quick peak at Genesis 11:1-9, this is the story of the tower of Babel:

“Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, “Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.”... “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped

building the city. That is why it was called Babel —because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.” (NIV)

As recorded here, the world, with one language, was gathered together in unity to make a name for themselves---a name that excluded God. The Lord determined that this godless community stood anatomically opposed to the spiritual community He envisioned. In response, the Lord came down, confused their language and scattered them. In the Babel event, a key verse to consider in reference to the Pentecostal phenomenon of tongues is verse 8, “So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city,” (NIV). So we’ll see that during the Babel phenomenon, a complete breakdown of community stopped the evil purpose that had bound the whole world together in that time. As a result, the world’s grand city-project of eponymic fame was destroyed, and the people were forced to scatter over the face of the earth, divided by different languages— keep that in mind. Regarding the spawning of these different languages, one scholar

(Brueggemann) suggests that all human language had become a language of disobedience (97)— a language of disobedience because each of these human languages were formed out of rebellion. These divinely enforced groups of languages (this was God's doing) seeded the mission fields of the world and, for thousands of years, drove a massive wedge between the chosen people of God, that is the Israelites, and the godless.

God's Intended Purpose for a United World Community Spread Throughout the Earth.

With that foundation laid, now let's return to Acts 2. Leading up to the day of Pentecost, for perhaps the first time since the Babel event, the whole world was brought together again through the Roman empire. Acts 2:5 says that many different nationalities were present, including the gathering together of Jews from every nation. Here, the Christian Galileans were gathered in unity when the Spirit came mightily upon them, then they miraculously spoke in other tongues as inspired by the Spirit. The foreigners in the vicinity crowded together at the clamorous sound, utterly amazed because the Galileans were exuberantly expressing the wonders of God in

their own languages (Acts 2:11). Where Babel brought confusion through the utterance of different languages, Pentecost brought amazement by the wonders of God expressed in those languages.

In response to this outpouring, Peter addressed the crowd—but before looking at Peter’s address to the crowd, it is important to first compare the Pentecostal outpouring with the Babel event. When we do that, the full magnitude of what I consider to be God’s global, missional purpose for the spiritual gift of tongues comes to light through Peter’s address. The Babel event introduced diverse tongues as a clear sign of judgement for the arrogant pride of the world and their refusal to acknowledge God. The Babel event created a distinct, formidable barrier between God’s chosen people and the godless. This barrier was often reinforced, even exploited, through the judgements of the prophets and religious leaders all the way to the time of Jesus.

However, the divinely inspired tongues given to the believers on the day of Pentecost were, after 400 years of prophetic silence, an explosive, prophetic sign that ushered in the end-times and opened the door of redemption to all of humankind. Pentecost was, in the

words of the scholar Stronstad, “a great and glorious day of salvation” (Ch. 4); Rather than shutting the godless nations out of this budding chosen community, the Lord made Himself known in the diverse native languages through the Spirit-inspired utterances. The Pentecost event tore down the long-established barrier of alienation and gave authority to the early church to spread the Gospel from Jerusalem to the whole world as they knew it. As a result, the gift of the Holy Spirit inaugurated, or in the least, confirmed the reception of the worldwide community into the kingdom of heaven and redeemed the world’s languages of disobedience. For the first time in history, God’s chosen people were to become a multi-national, worldwide, Spirit-empowered community.

The Gift of Tongues is Babel in Reverse.

The gift of tongues is the reversal of the Babel event. Now, with the connection to Babel in mind, let’s take a quick peak at Peter’s response to the crowd. (Acts 2:14-18, 21)- “Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen

carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." vs. 21: "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Then from here Peter preaches about Jesus.

In his address, Peter states that this Holy Spirit event is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of the last days. What he means is, this speaking in tongues is a prophetic gift that is given to all of God's people, not for the purpose of judgement, but for the purpose of unveiling the Gospel of Jesus Christ through Spirit-inspired witness—for unveiling the wonders of God through Spirit-inspired utterances. Consequently, we see that directly after Peter's address, three thousand people were saved in one day. As a result of the outpouring of the Spirit and the gift of tongues, the name of Jesus was made known to all of the nations, and His salvation was made available to

all who would respond— this changed the course of history. So, the scripture here indicates that the Spirit-inspired gift of tongues is at the heart of God's missional intent to establish a united community of every nationality spread across the face of the earth. This global community operates by the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim salvation through Jesus, to exalt His name above all names. So what does this mean for you and I today?

Implications

The outpouring of the Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in tongues, signals the birth of a diverse community that is the antithesis of the disobedient Babel community. So starting with Pentecost, a community was born, filled with people who seek to build a spiritual city, not with worldly wisdom and rationale, but by the Holy Spirit and inspired Word of God. These people do not seek to make a name for themselves, but they creatively make the name of Jesus famous throughout the world for the sake of the lost. By the Holy Spirit's mysterious design, a common spiritual language empowers and unites these people, both with God and one another in their global

mission. Now this is where you and I come in, we are already a part of this diverse worldwide community, and the gift of tongues is available to each of us for the purpose of uniting us together, with God and each other. Just as God did not underestimate the power of the people with one language at Babel, we should not underestimate the power of this spiritual language that we, as a worldwide community of believers, have access to.

For the sake of time, I'll cover very quickly just one aspect of the power of tongues for the individual believer - and again, I'm not going to get into how to speak in tongues, or the proper use of tongues in the church, or even tongues spoken in a "heavenly" language versus tongues spoken in an actual human language not known by the speaker. That is another sermon or two.

Let's look at 1 Cor. 14:2. "for anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God... they utter mysteries by the Spirit." In one sense, the gift of tongues can be thought of as an edifying, heart-to-heart communication with God that liberates the believer from the limiting cognitive dimension. A little further down in

this scripture Paul says “if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays” and, to paraphrase, the mind stays out of it. Tongues places the rationale of the human mind in subjection to the Holy Spirit, when it is appropriate to do so. I’m sure everyone here has been in a place in your life where you just don’t have words to explain what you’re going through, and you just don’t know what to say to God, you can’t even muster up the energy to pray— deep feelings can be destructive when there are no words to express them! The gift of tongues takes that deep groaning, where human language fails, and gives it a spiritual expression that allows spirit, small s, to communicate to Spirit, big S, as inspired by the Spirit (big S). This spirit-to-Spirit communication allows the Holy Spirit to re-encode the deep parts of the inner being and regenerate the believer’s mind to become the mind of Christ. Galatians 5:16 says “walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desire of the flesh.”

The gift of tongues plays a part in re-encoding our minds through the spirit with the language of obedience in place of the language of disobedience. This, my friends, imparts the believer with power and authority to not only proclaim the Gospel of Jesus but to live it out as well! Moreover, the gift of tongues brings the pure, healing power of

Holy Spirit language into the world where evil, destructive intent has ever moved the lips of the world's languages.

Conclusion

In sum, the Babel event was a time where the whole world was united with one language and one purpose but at odds with the will of God. As a result, the Lord came down, confused their language and seeded the mission fields of the world. During Pentecost, the whole world was brought together, and the Holy Spirit burst out on the waiting disciples, causing all of them to speak in the tongues represented there. However, where Babel scattered all the people with confusion and languages of disobedience, Pentecost gathered all the people together with amazement at the wonders of God being heard. The Pentecost event tore down the barriers of alienation and signaled the beginning of a worldwide, Spirit-filled community. Accordingly, the outpouring of the Spirit reversed the judgement of Babel and created an empowered community for the purpose of spreading the Gospel throughout the world. The gift of tongues unites the believer with God and His purposes and unites the community of believers with each other so that they may carry out the global

mission of proclaiming the rule of Christ, with power and authority. Through the Pentecostal outpouring and the gift of tongues, the missional purpose of the Holy Spirit is unveiled. For He reaches into the language of every nation to gather one, worldwide community, empowering them to spread the Gospel across the face of the whole earth.

Appendix

I'm going to finish with my own personal testimony about this. The gift of tongues has been a profound spiritual gift that I have continuously relied on in my life for every situation. When praying in tongues I believe that I am uttering words that have creative power by the Spirit, that will not return void, and that speak the mind of Christ to my spirit in ways that my own human language cannot express. The evidence I have in my own life is that my prayer in tongues brings life to my spirit when I desperately need it. In addition, when I speak in tongues, my inner-being rises up in tandem with the words. In this, my mind does not need to burden itself with struggling to find the right words. Rather, my spirit is set free to express what is true and accurate in my inner being. What follows is a change of mind, a

regeneration that comes from the Holy Spirit—a divinely inspired creation of new possibilities. Once the mind is changed, new meanings are formed in my human language, and different actions result. In addition, a new faith and a new boldness rises up, which gives me courage in my witness of Christ. This is the result of the spiritual language of obedience that the Holy Spirit has gifted— it is truly a heavenly source that breaks the human languages of disobedience.

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